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SUBJECT: ANKARA MEDIA REACTION REPORT

MONDAY, AUGUST 21, 2006

In Today's Papers

Foreign Minister Gul Visits Israel; Discusses Peacekeeping Force
All papers: Foreign Minister Gul visited Israel yesterday to check the pulse of the Israeli authorities on UN peacekeeping force deployment. Gul met with Israeli PM Ehud Olmert, FM Tzipi Livni and Defense Minister Peretz and urged them to actively participate in efforts to bring permanent peace and stability to the Middle East. Gul also underlined the importance of the concerned parties acting in accordance with UN resolution 1701. During his visit, Gul urged all concerned parties to seek ways to solve problems through dialogue and underlined Turkey's diplomatic efforts for peace and humanitarian assistance to the Lebanese people. Hurriyet reports that Israeli PM Olmert openly told Gul that Israel would like to see Turkish troops among the UN forces in Lebanon. FM Gul commented that the international peacekeeping force would not be responsible for fighting Hezbollah. After Israel, FM Gul met with Palestinian leader Mahmoud Abbas in the West Bank. In other Middle East-related news, Aksam and others report that thousands demonstrated in Istanbul yesterday against Israeli and the US policies in the Middle East.

Mustafa Balbay, writing in the leftist-nationalist Cumhuriyet, warns that Turkey is making a commitment to the force "without knowing what the framework is": "Secretary Rice uttered some key words recently on the Lebanon issue when she called for a new Middle East. Turkey is certainly a part of this new plan but will be kept out of the information loop regarding the details and processes. According to the scenario, co-designed by the US and France, Turkey needs to know only the part that it will have to play -- not the entire plan. Moreover there is no guarantee that this scenario will not change as it moves forward. Turkey's ruling AKP is making a commitment to participate in the Lebanese peacekeeping force without even knowing what its framework is. Something is very clear though: the Lebanese peacekeeping force will be protecting American and Israeli interests in the region."

On the other hand, Washington-based Omer Taspinar commented in the liberal-intellectual Radikal that joining the force would "strengthen Turkey's hand": "The international community, including Arabs and the US, are expecting Turkey's contribution and we should not keep Turkey out of this. This is not only a matter of prestige and historic responsibility for Turkey but also it can offer a unique chance if we can design the sending force plan with careful political analysis. By assuming a serious role in Lebanon, Turkey can ask the US to take concrete steps on PKK and Cyprus issues. Ankara can also initiate and host a brand new conference on the Middle East through its influence in the region as well as its relations with Washington."

National Security Council Meeting Today

Yeni Safak, Zaman, Radikal and others: The National Security Council (NSC) will convene under President Sezer today. Latest developments in the Middle East, possible Turkish troop deployment in Lebanon and the PKK issue will be the major issues of the meeting. Outgoing Chief of General Staff Hilmi Ozkok will make a farewell speech and Gendarmerie General Fevzi Turkeri will also bid farewell at today's meeting.

President Sezer Declines Talabani's Appointment Request

Sabah reports on page one that Iraqi President Talabani sent to Turkey many requests for an official visit through different channels, including through the US, urging Turkey to strengthen its ties with Iraqi leaders. However, despite US pressure, President Sezer declined to give Talabani an appointment. Sources close to Sezer said that as long as the PKK's activities continue and Turkish soldiers are martyred, President Sezer will not consider inviting Talabani. Iraqi officials reportedly consider this rejection as a lack of political courtesy.

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PKK Meets with the US Officials, PKK Attacks

Cumhuriyet, Sabah, Zaman: Cumhuriyet draws attention to a report by the Turkish security forces in Iraq that Kurdish leaders Barzani and Talabani have been supporting the PKK and that US officials had been in touch with PKK militants. According to this report, US majors and higher ranked military officials have held more than a hundred meetings with the PKK since the beginning of the year. The report says the goal of PKK activities is to stir an uprising among the Kurds. Sabah reports that the PKK launched a bomb attack on the Iran-Turkey natural gas pipeline in Taslicay, Agri Province. It took five hours for the fire on the pipeline to be put out. Zaman says this is the sixth attack on the pipeline by the PKK within the last seven months. Sabah and Cumhuriyet report that two PKK terrorists were killed during an operation in a rural area in Sivas Province.

Writing in the mainstream Milliyet, Semih Idiz argues that a "dialogue of the deaf is going on between Ankara and Washington" on the PKK issue: "Given the current atmosphere, it is not a surprise that Ankara was annoyed by Washington's recent call on the PKK to disarm. The pending issue of a US coordinator for the PKK has also become another reason to mistrust the US. The common perception is that those efforts are unwelcome because both the call for the PKK to lay down arms and the PKK coordinator are seen as steps toward making Turkey consider the PKK a negotiation partner. There are a significant number of Americans who believe that Turkey should sit at the table with Kurds once the PKK declares that it is giving up arms and engaging in politics. Given the current psychology fed with everyday news of PKK attacks and murders, the US seems not to realize that this is an unacceptable argument for Turkey."

Iranian Planes Searched by Turkey

Zaman, Vatan, Aksam, Sabah and others: Iranian Government Spokesman Asefi confirmed that Turkey had forced two Iranian planes to land and searched them for missiles. Although this was a routine procedure, Iran was disturbed by these searches, when the two countries enjoy a good relationship such practices are not appropriate, added Asefi.

TV News:

(NTV, 8.00 A.M.)

Domestic News

There were 47 forest fires in the Aegean and the Mediterranean coast during last 48 hours. One fire, in Selcuk, Kusadasi, is threatening the historic home of the Virgin Mary

CHP leader Deniz Baykal warns that Turkish troops sent to Lebanon could be dragged into the fighting there

International News

Israeli PM Ehud Olmert said that countries that do not have diplomatic relations with his country should not be allowed to deploy troops in Lebanon

Heavy fighting in southern Afghanistan leaves 76 suspected Taliban dead

17 people were killed and over 200 wounded in a major Shiite festival in Baghdad

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